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CHAPTER XX

FUNERAL CUSTOMS

When a Karen is ill, his sickness is thought to be due to some action of the malevolent spirits of the unseen world or to the wandering of his "k'la" (life principle or psyche). His malady may be due to an accident, an attack of indigestion after eating too many green mangoes, or an infection of some sort; but, according to his belief, some invisible spirit has been offended by a slight and is the real cause of his disorder.[1]

The seven-fold "k'la," which presides over the life of every person from the time of his birth, will, the Karen believes, determine the time and manner of that person's death. Notwithstanding the fact that one or another of the many causes of death will sometime effect the dissolution of every member of the race, the Karen makes offerings to delay as long as possible the inevitable end. Most propitiatory feasts require the presence of every immediate member of the family, in order to render the feasts acceptable to the spirits. If the sick person seems to be sinking, his relatives will all remain and try to be at hand when he breathes his last.

Karen funerals are by no means solemn occasions. On the contrary, they afford the greatest opportunity for the people to enjoy themselves. I have heard it said that when a considerable time has elapsed since a death in a particular region, the young people long for someone to die, so that they may have a jolly time. The question has often been raised why the Karen, who are not without family affection, conduct themselves in what to Occidentals is a very unseemly manner at the funerals of their dearly beloved ones. Possibly some light is thrown on this question by the story of the fabulous White Python. According to this story, after the python had been compelled to release "Naw Mü E," it took vengeance by killing men in great numbers by discharging its venom on their footprints. It took pleasure in hearing of the suffering and sorrow it was causing the human race and, therefore, redoubled its efforts. The peo-

[1] See Chapter XXIII, pp. 239-245, and Chapter XXIV, pp. 249-254, 257.

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to ride when searching for the "k' las" of human beings. Any person who kills one of these animals arouses the enmity of the spirit.

The "Hti k' sa kaw k' sa," or "lords of the water and land," or "lords of the earth," are the deities who rule over the lands of the earth. They are superior to the spirits that preside over rivers and mountains and have tempers that are easily disturbed. Ill-spoken words, as well as improper and immoral actions, easily offend them; and they take vengeance on persons guilty of such misdemeanors by sending tigers, snakes, and various illnesses upon them. They are sometimes confused with the king of hades, who also passes judgment on the sins of mortals. One way to avoid angering the lords of the earth is to scrape a little rice from the top of the pot while cooking and lay it aside as an offering to them. Concerning their relation to these divinities, the people say that if they transgress in their language while in a distant land, the lords of the earth will kill them before dark; but if guilty of swearing or using indecent words in their own country, they can assuage the anger of these spirits by making an offering of rice and water at the foot of a tree and uttering the following prayer: "O Lords of the earth, we are ignorant people. Whatever transgressions we have been guilty of in using harsh or obscene words, do not, O Lords, hold them against us. We will make offerings annually. If we do not die, you shall eat of our food every year and of our children's offerings generation after generation."

Every tree, river, lake, and, indeed, almost every natural object is supposed by the Karen to be inhabited by its "k' sa" or divinity. These local spirits, however, are regarded by many as constituting lower orders of the divinities of the first group. When a man selects the location for his field, he must perform certain ceremonies to win their good will. The simplest of these is to place offerings of rice and water at the foot of some large tree in the plot chosen or to go through the ceremonies described in the chapter on Agricultural Pursuits and Other Occupations.[4] There are also the annual sacrifices to these spirits that have been described fully in the chapter on Propitiatory Sacrifices and Healing Offerings, pp. 234, ff.

The nefarious work and character of "Naw k' plaw" or "Mü kaw li" have been sufficiently revealed in the narration of the story of his temptation of the first parents of the Karen race in the

[4] See ante, pp. 76, ff.

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C. The Small Sacrifice of the Sgaw

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Besides the great sacrifice offered by the Sgaw to the lords of the land, they also make a small sacrifice ("Ta lü hpo") to the same powers. A few men—the exact number being determined by divination—build a little booth in the jungle and clear three paths leading from it. They sacrifice a white fowl, letting some of its blood into a bamboo joint containing liquor. Some of the blood is smeared on the outside of the joint and on the posts of the booth, and feathers from the fowl are stuck to it. A kind of broom is made by splitting a bamboo, with which they beat the booth, while praying: "O Lords of the land and water. Let the sick member of my family change places with this fowl. Forgive his sins and free him from disease." Sometimes they address their prayer to the water-witch: "We are offering thee the blood of this fowl. Eat this and go thy way. Do not come near us." After cooking and eating the fowl, they color a little cotton thread yellow and wind it about their water-joint. Having returned home, they draw water and sprinkle some of it on the sick person. A piece of the colored thread is then tied around his waist so that the demon may identify him as the one for whom the offering was made. They must not permit any one to accompany them on their sacrificial journey or to converse with them.

II. Offerings for the Sick

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The small sacrifice described above is one of the offerings for the sick, but because it is made to the lords of the land rather than to the evil spirits who entice away and feed upon the "k'las" of human beings, I have grouped it with the offerings to those deities. Certain demons are malicious and require placating and diverting to keep them from indulging in this practice, which results in the illness and perhaps the death of the persons involved. Divination may indicate that some particular demon, for example, one of the water-witches ("Na hti") or one of the ghosts of tyrants that dwell in the jungles ("T're t' hka"), is engaged in this nefarious work. If so, the rites peculiar to that demon must be executed in an effort to induce it to leave the village and follow the person carrying the offerings to some lonely spot in the jungle, there to remain and partake of the aroma of the feast, much as one would entice

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753 787 782 a pig from rooting in the garden to follow an ear of corn back to its pen. Having gone through this performance, the carrier stealthily returns, trying on the way to deceive the demon into believing that he has taken some other trail by blocking the one he has actually followed, and fondly thinking that he has removed the cause of the sickness of the member of his household.

I am led to believe that many offerings are made in remote districts that belong in this group, although I have obtained no accurate account of them. The recital in the succeeding paragraphs will suffice, however, to convey a general idea of the nature of these rites, in all of which, when the ceremony is concluded, the wrist of the patient is tied around with a string to keep the "k'la" from getting away again.[6]

The offering made when the "T're t' hka," or ghosts of evil tyrants that inhabit the deep jungles, wander into the village and attack the "k' la" of some one, is called "Ta taw law ta." This rite requires the weaving of a small basket, in the bottom of which cotton is laid, and on this four lumps of cooked rice, one colored black with soot, another yellow with tumeric, the third red with amotta berries (from the *Biza orellana*), and the fourth left white. A chick is tied to the basket, being made secure by binding both its wings and its feet. Finally, sprigs of yellow and white cockscomb are laid in the basket.

The basket thus fitted out is carried beyond at least two ridges of hills to a place from which it is believed the demon will not be able to find its way back. There the basket is set down with its contents, and the following petition is offered: "We are bringing you red and yellow rice and yellow and white flowers, O Great 'T're t' hka.' Go back to your own place. Keep away from us." The performers of this rite may sweep a spot under the basket and pick up a clod of earth near at hand. Calling the "k'la" to follow them they leave the chick and rice with the basket to be the food of the ghost and return home. As they go along they break off branches which they place in the path to throw the demon off their track should he attempt to follow them.[7] On arriving at the house, they

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[6] It is not uncommon to see a black line tatooed about a Karen's wrist, the obvious purpose of which is to serve as a permanent hindrance against the escape of his "k'la," thus preventing sickness.

[7] In traveling if one who goes ahead wishes to warn those following not to take a certain path, one puts branches across its entrance. Thus, notice is given that the path is "killed" and not to be taken.

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call out to ask whether the patient has recovered or not, and, on being assured that he has, they ascend the ladder and put a bit of the clod in the hole of his ear-lobe, believing that they have taken ample measures to promote his recovery.

In performing the ceremony called "Ta hu law pa law," a bundle containing a handful of chaff, a piece of broken pot, and a few chicken feathers is used to touch the sick person, while "Ta mü to ka, Ta yu ta pleh" are addressed as follows: "O Spirits and very bad Witches, we are cooling your anger lest you look with longing eyes on this person. Restore and heal him. Go back to your places, east, west, north, or south. Return to your own abodes." The bundle is then borne out along a path indicated by the omens and left there. The person carrying it pretends to retire into the jungle, but really returns home.

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In the rite known as "Ta taw the hka heh" the patient's friends carry to a considerable distance a little basket containing a chick and a prepared betel quid. A similar petition to that given above is then uttered, and the chick is split in halves and replaced in the basket, which is hidden in some hollow tree or rock crevice. Again a plea is made, the basket and its contents are left behind, and a circuitous route home is followed, the bushes along the way being cut in order to convince the demons by the marks of the knife that they will be cut by it, should they follow after.

The rite performed when the water-witches are supposed to have enticed a "k'la" away is called "Ta lu hti htu hti." A fowl of one color must be carried down to the water, where a small altar is erected of two rows of twelve posts each, the two rows converging like the rafters of a roof. The fowl is killed and its blood smeared on the posts, four feathers being stuck on each of the corner posts. The lords of the water and the lakes, the water-witches, are then besought, in case the sick person has invaded their province in any way or they have caused his illness, to partake of the fowl, sweet liquor, and rice that are provided and allow the "k'la" to return and the person to recover. The petition closes with the words: "Do not look with longing eyes upon him, but eat your feast here." The sick man's friends then cook and eat the fowl and return home.

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It appears that sometimes the water-witches are offended by a person who is in bathing and cause him to become ill with cramps or indigestion. In such a case rice, saffron, and spices are placed

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upon the head of the offender and then taken to a rock at the water-side. The witches are summoned by repeatedly striking the rock and urged to enjoy their feast there.

The ceremony, "Ta di law kweh leh," is performed with a bundle containing a handful of chaff, bits of broken pot, a piece of bamboo, some scrapings of gold and silver, and a fowl. After the patient has been touched with this bundle, the demons of "Piū" (hades), the king of hades, and the Great Elephant ("Ta do k' the, ta do k' saw") are addressed as follows: "I am exchanging the sick person for a big bird and a big fowl, for quantities of gold and silver. Let his shade depart. If you hold him, go." The bundle is then carried out along the road and laid down, and the fowl is plucked. The latter is brought home, the bushes along the way being beaten with a bamboo with split ends, while the "k'la" is summoned to follow. On arriving near the house, the friends call to those within to see if it has returned. On receiving a favorable reply, they enter, tie up the wrist of the sick person, and cook the fowl.[8]

A different form of the above ceremony is described by Thra Than Bya.[9] According to his account, the friends carry only a fowl to the place on the road and there place a dead leaf on a little mound of earth, after which they call the "k' la" to return. Then they take the fowl home and cook it, and, after the sick one has eaten a morsel, the rest of the family partake.

Another form of the offering by the roadside is called "Ka law ta." In this instance a bamboo post about four feet long is set up, the upper end of which is split and the splints spread apart by weaving in and out a piece of bamboo. Upon this a little mat of loosely woven bamboo is laid, on which are placed three chicken feathers, a few pieces of egg shell, and a roll of cotton blackened with charcoal at three points. The feathers seem to represent a fowl and the cotton a pig, for the one making the offering says, addressing the demons in general: "I am giving you a pig and a fowl. Do not come near me any more. Help me and heal me." This offering differs from any of the others mentioned in this chapter in that it is sym-

[8] I am told that now, with the waning of the faith in these old customs, the person who has taken out the offering occasionally becomes angry if the people in the house do not give a favorable answer concerning the return of th "k' la" and the improvement of the patient, and refuses to repeat the ceremony, as he is supposed to do.

[9] Rev. T. Than Bya, *Karen Customs*, p. 90.

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bolic, and also in the fact that the patient performs the rite in his own behalf.

III. Offerings to the "K'la" Itself

Sometimes the auspices indicate that the "k' la" of an ill person has departed by reason of fright or from some other cause than being enticed by a malicious demon. The place to which it has gone and the method by which it may be won back are also shown by the omens. In such cases the appeal and offerings are made to the "k' la" itself.

In performing the rite known as "Ta kweh k' la hpa do" (the great ceremony of calling the "k'la"), two black fowls, namely, a cock and a hen, must be killed by wringing their necks. Their internal organs must be cleaned and replaced and the birds cooked whole. They are then laid on a tray on which are three Malay apple leaves, seven lumps of cold rice, and a cup of fragrant water.[10] The tray with its contents is set at the head of the stairs or ladder, and a lighted candle is placed there. A white cotton thread is carried from the tray to the foot of the stairs and fastened. The fragrant water, after being blown upon by the head of the house, is sprinkled on the family and on the stairs.[11] A lump of rice is then charmed and thrown down the stairs, which are beaten with a stick, and the "k' la" of the invalid is summoned. The call is: "Pru-u-u k'la,[12]—heh ke, heh ke. (O Shade, come back, come back.)" If for any reason it is thought that the shade has not heeded this call, the operation is repeated until the family feels assured that it has returned. They then immediately break the string by means of which it has ascended the stairs and throw it away, lest it should again escape. With other pieces of string they tie up the wrists of the sick person and the other members of the family, meanwhile calling the "k' la" to remain. The patient is bathed all over with what is left of the fragrant water and is then expected to recover.

The rite of "Ta kweh k' la," or inviting the "k'la" to return, is performed in the house, like the one described above. The family

[10] The leaves named (those of the "thabye" or *Eugenia malaccensis*) are generally used for this purpose, but I do not know why.

[11] When the Karen on the plains perform these ceremonies, in which the wandering "k'la" is expected to return to the house by the ladder, they retain the old-fashioned notched log that has served from time immemorial as the means of entrance to the house, but that is being superseded in modern houses by flights of stairs. They think the "k'la" will more easily return by the kind of stairs to which it has been accustomed.

[12] "Pru-u-u-" is a sort of trill which the women use in calling their children, pigs, or fowls, as well as their "k' las."

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782 elder takes the stirring-stick from its hole in the fireplace post and
753 strikes the top of the house ladder to attract the attention of the
755 "k'la," which he begs to return, saying: "Pru-u-u we, pru-u k' la, come back, whether you have gone to the west, east, north, or south; come back, whether you are in the bush, jungle, or ends of the earth; come back to your pleasant dwelling, to your comfortable home. I will prepare delicious pork and fowl for you. Eat of your rice and drink of your liquor. Do not wander off any more." Then the animal specified in the divination is killed—pig, fowl, goat, ox, or buffalo—and if a fowl, its bones are examined for the omen, which is favorable in case the holes are even in number. In case one of the animals has been indicated, the performers of the rite look for a rounded gall-bladder. If the auspices are unfavorable, they must repeat the whole operation until they find the conditions satisfactory. The animal is then cut up, cooked, and the feast proceeds. During these ceremonies every member of the family must be present.

787 The rite, "Ta waw k'la" (driving back the "k'la"), has some
782 features not found in the one described in the preceding paragraph
753 and is performed in the jungle and along the paths where the ghost
755 has disappeared, as revealed by the divination. The man of the house splits the end of a bamboo pole into four splints and spreads them into a crude broom, which he takes to the place where the "k'la" became lost. With a prayer similar to that quoted above he calls the wandering "k'la" and beats the bushes all the way home. Before entering, he asks the usual question about the return of the ghost and receives the usual answer. Mounting to the house, he beats the top of the ladder with the stirring-stick, repeating the invitation to the "k'la" to return and then beats the posts of the fireplace, asking repeatedly if it has come back and getting the same reply. Finally, the animal or fowl is killed and the omen declared. In case it is favorable, the feast proceeds.

The rite for the return of a "k'la" thought to have been driven off by the wind is called "Ta yaw ke a k'la." A bracelet is suspended by a string from the tip of a slender bamboo over a cup containing a little sticky rice and a hard-boiled egg. The elder strikes the cup with the stirring-stick and begs the "k'la" to come back out of the winds, the storm, the firmament, from near the stars or the moon, and eat the egg. The string supporting the bracelet is

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usually poorly spun, and the suspended object twists back and forth until finally the string parts, and the ornament drops into the cup. A person standing near claps a cloth over the receptacle to confine the "k'la." If an air-space is found at the end of the egg, it is a sign that the shade has returned; if not, the experiment must be repeated.[13]

The ceremony, "Ta hpi htaw ke a k'la," is in order when a person's sickness is attributed to the detention of his "k'la" under the water or in a swampy place. The auspices having shown the necessity for this rite and the kind of creature to be sacrificed, the performers of the rite throw up a little mound at the foot of the ladder with a sharp bamboo stick or other implement, and set upon it in order bundles of glutinous rice and jars or bamboo joints of liquor. The victim, say a fowl, is plucked, and, after the shade has been attracted by making a noise, it is addressed as the great "k'la": "If you have been drowned in the water or are anywhere under the mud or the ground; if you have been led astray in the water or the mire," says the leader, "I beg you to come back to your pleasant dwelling, to your comfortable home. Come eat delicious pork and toothsome chicken. Come and partake of sweet liquor and white rice." The victim is struck on the head with the stirring-stick, killed, and the omens examined. If these prove to be favorable, the fowl is cooked and the feast is held. As is usual in such ceremonies when the shade is believed to have returned, the wrist of the patient is tied with string to prevent its wandering again. A piece of the string, together with a morsel of the rice and meat, is placed on the fontanel ("hko hti") of the patient, which is considered the seat of the "k' la."

Prophets and Elders

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The propitiatory sacrifices discussed in the first section of this chapter are evidently tribal functions and are, therefore, inaugurated by the chiefs. Formerly men called "wi," especially designated as prophets, were consulted to interpret the auspices. On occasion they went into trances in order to reveal secrets. Their office in most of the Karen tribes was for life or while they maintained a good character, and it involved a knowledge of the ancient poetry of

[13] See p. 297 of Chapter XX (Funeral Customs) for a similar method of determining the presence of the "k' la" of the dead.

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whole family. She is the "Bgha a' hko." This custom seems to hark back to the matriarchal stage of development among the Karen, as also does the fact that the groom goes to live with the bride's family. Why a woman should hold the place of honor at the "Bgha" feast has been "explained" to me in two ways, namely, (1) that a female was the first person to fall under the influence of "Mū kaw li" (Satan) in the orchard, and (2) that as the woman is the more susceptible to sickness, she properly has more to do with the offerings and should take the leading part in making them. The Karen maintain that the elders are responsible for these explanations and that the ceremonial of the "Bgha" feast has come down from time immemorial.

There are three kinds of "Bgha" feasts. The most familiar kind is that observed by the members of the immediate family when one of their number has fallen sick, in case divination shows that his illness is due to his having offended the "Bgha." In such a case the family must at once join in a feast. The second kind of feast is that observed as a preventive of possible sickness and as a means of keeping on good terms with the "Bgha." This is known as "ta aw bwaw a' tha" (eating to strengthen one's heart). The third kind of feast is that participated in by all the kindred, when the most elaborate rites are celebrated. Such a feast is called "ta aw saw ke saw na." While there is a general resemblance among the feasts held all over the Karen country, the various tribes and even parts of the same tribe differ in the details of their observances.

In the case of an illness found by divination to be due to the "Bgha," the ceremonial of the feast among the Sgaw Karen of the Tharrawaddy district and in the Pegu Hills, is as follows: After a pot of rice has been set on the fire to boil, a fowl is caught and killed, and its feathers are burned off in the fireplace. It is then cut up and cooked with salt and a chili and placed on the table or family tray. The father, mother, and children in the order of their ages severally partake of a morsel, after which they eat their meal together. If the parents of the father and mother are living, the feast is held in the morning; but if they are dead, it is held in the afternoon. On the following morning a pig is caught, brought into the house, and its legs are tied together. It is then killed by strangulation or by wrenching the neck, care being taken not to break any of its bones or bruise its skin lest some of its blood should be spilled. The body of the pig is then run through lengthwise on

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a spit, its bristles are burned off, and it is then carried into the house and laid at the head of the sleeping-mats. The father and other members of the family touch the side of the animal with the tips of their fingers. In Shwegyin and Siam this rite is still observed, but in many other localities it has been discontinued. The pig is now ready to be cut up and cooked, after which the members of the family each taste of the meat in turn, avoiding eating anything from the hind-quarters that day and from the fore-quarters the next, in case their grandparents are living. If, however, their grandparents are dead, they may eat from any part of the animal. After having thus each taken a morsel, they complete their meal. If any is left after the feast, it is not uncommon nowadays for the family to invite in some of their neighbors to finish the remainder. This is contrary to the old practice among the Karen.

In the remoter regions, where the complete ceremonial is still observed, its main features differ but little from those described above, but the details are much more fully observed, and I will, therefore, describe the ceremonial as it is carried out in those areas. The rice having first been cooked, the water from it must be poured into the fireplace and the pot set down in the wet ashes, while the chicken is caught by the wife who brings the fowl into the house and hands it to her husband. He holds it under his arm, strokes its beak toward the point, and says: "Take away sickness. Remove weariness and swellings. Give me life and health for a hundred years." Then the wife and each child in turn stroke the chicken's beak, while the father repeats the same prayer for each one. He next wrings the fowl's neck, scalds the bird in a jar of water, plucks its feathers and carefully puts them in a receptacle by the fire, and removes the intestines and places them with the feathers. The flesh is cut up, cooked, and served, each member of the family taking a morsel. The father now places a small quantity of the rice and chicken on a tray and summons "the great ancestors of old" to partake. Meantime, the family eat the feast, after which the father throws away the offering. The pig is eaten on the following day, but in Siam two days are allowed to elapse before this part of the feast is celebrated. In preparation for this event the father goes into the jungle after an early breakfast, taking with him one of his children or, if he has no child, calling some other boy to accompany him. He carries a small basket and his "xeh" or sickle. He returns with two pieces of bamboo, each two full joints in

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length, some plantain leaves, and a pole long enough to serve as a spit for the pig. He cuts one of the bamboo pieces into two sections in which to cook the rice and curry, and splits the other bamboo into withes. After the rice has been cooked, the mother mixes a little of it with chaff, puts some of it in a small pot and a lump of it on top of the pot, besides sprinkling water on the fireplace.

A Sgaw Karen Grandmother

Later the lump of chaff and rice is used as a bait in catching the pig that is to become the offering. Two withes of the outside and two of the inside of the bamboo are used in tying the feet of the animal, and one more of each kind to bind the feet together. Other withes are wound around the snout, one turn being passed through the mouth, which is thus closed securely. The pig is now carried into the house and laid on plantain leaves spread on the floor, a winnowing-tray being placed in front of it along with the

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pot of rice and chaff and a small bamboo cup ("maw"). Three times in succession the father touches first the pig and then the pot with the tips of his fingers, while addressing the "Bgha" as follows: "Avert all sickness from me. Let me be well and live a long life. I am feeding you with pork. Therefore, help me." The same petition is uttered as the other members of the family touch the pig in their turn. The father then strikes the animal three times with his "xeh" and stabs it thrice with a knife, but not to a greater depth than the width of four fingers. The killing of the pig is completed by binding its snout in a wet cloth to smother it and by wrenching its neck. The withes are now removed from its feet, and the carcass is carried to another part of the room and washed. After being laid again on the plantain leaves, an opening is made in its belly for the purpose of examining the gall-bladder. If this organ is plump, the omen is favorable and the feast may proceed. Otherwise, another pig must be sacrificed on the following day, and if necessary another, until a gall-bladder is found that meets the required conditions.

A satisfactory offering having been obtained, the intestines are removed and the carcass is impaled lengthwise on the sharpened stick brought from the jungle, and the bristles are burned off at a new fireplace built for the feast in the inner room of the house. After the body is washed it is butchered: first the head and stabbed shoulder being cut off in one piece, then the hind leg on the same side, next the fore and hind legs on the other side. The carcass is now opened down the front and down the middle of the back, the side that was stabbed being first removed and prepared. The wife puts the currypot on to boil, while her husband cuts up the meat, including the heart, liver, and lungs, some of which is dropped into one of the bamboo joints over the top of which a plantain leaf is tied. The other bamboo joint is filled with rice, and both vessels are set over the fire and watched carefully to prevent burning. However, the vessels must not be removed from the fire before their contents are thoroughly cooked, else the offering would be offensive to the "Bgha."

The rest of the pork is cooked in the currypot, which the wife has set on the fire. The wife must clean out the intestines, which she does outside the house. When she brings them in, the husband brushes off any ashes that may be on the top of the little pot and covers the mouth of it with a plantain leaf. He makes

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little holes in the covering and inserts short pieces of bamboo down into the pot obliquely, so as to hold the cover on. He then pours water in through these holes. He now makes a sort of standard, called "thi keh," out of a strip of bamboo. The bamboo is split into three strips, but not entirely separated. They are bound together at three points with withes, and then the two outer ones are broken between the bindings but only enough to make them stand out like arms akimbo. The lower ends of each of the side strips are bent out and then brought back and inserted in a hole, or under the lowest withe around the stock. This is set in the pot. What the significance of this is, neither my informant could tell me, nor do the reference books help one to find the meaning of it.

When the food has been cooked, the husband empties the rice on one tray and the pork on another; and the members of the family—father, mother, and the children in succession according to their ages—each take a morsel from both trays. Then the father takes a swallow from a pot containing water or liquor, being followed by the others in due order. He also pours out two cups of the liquid for the ancestors of the family and throws the rest away. He collects into a bundle the withes used in tying the feet of the pig and hangs it on the end of one of the floor joists at the rear of the house. Finally, he washes his hands and returns to join his family in finishing the feast.

In case the grandparents are living, they are summoned to the "Bgha" feast and arrive on the evening preceding the event. After breakfast next morning the preparations are made much the same as described above, but include the providing of three little bamboo cups ("maw") and the construction of a tiny model of a house ("hi hpo hkeh") about a foot long, which is set in front of the pig and in which the favorable gall-bladder of the animal is placed, together with its heart and the lung and kidney of the side that has been stabbed. The organs of the other side and any blood remaining in the abdominal cavity are placed on a tray. Only the flesh of the stabbed side is used at once. While it is cooking, the wife pounds some rice, moistened with a little water, until it is reduced to fine flour. Two of the cups are filled with a mixture of this flour, chopped pork, and a little blood, and hung over the fire to cook. The wife washes the intestines of the animal, while her husband arranges the "thi keh" as before and dishes out the food for the family. When all is ready each member of the household partakes of a morsel and

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782 sip of liquor, the grandfather and grandmother coming after the
753 children. This ceremonial being completed, all eat together. In
755 the afternoon the intestines are cooked and eaten. Next morning
796 the husband removes the heart, lung, and kidney from the miniature
787 house, cuts them up, and cooks them. These are eaten, the room is cleaned, the little house is thrown away, the grandparents return home, and the sick person for whom the feast has been held is supposed to recover.

In some places the intestines of the pig and the blood-stained plantain leaves are put in a basket and hung on a tree in the jungle as an offering to "Thi Hko Mü Xa," the lord of the demons.

782 The second kind of "Bgha" feast is not preceded by divination.
602 It is held not to cure sickness in the family, but to prevent it. When one of the parents begins to worry lest illness may visit the family, the "Bgha" is feasted and venerated and the hearts of the family are thus strengthened, as they express it. Hence, this feast is called "Ta aw bwaw a' tha." The ceremonial does not differ from that described above.[1]

The third kind of feast is that in honor of the great "Bgha," in which all the kindred by blood participate. It is, therefore, called the feast of the whole family ("ta aw saw ke saw na"). The eldest female of the family, the grandmother if living, or if not her eldest daughter or granddaughter, presides as chief priestess or head of the "Bgha" ("Bgha a' hko"). If the feast is held annually, it occurs in April or May; but the priestess may fix a time at her pleasure when she feels that the "Bgha" should be honored and propitiated. Those required to attend this feast of the kindred are the full brothers and sisters of the priestess, her sons, daughters, and daughters' children; but her husband, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and their sons, together with her sons-in-law and the sons of her sons, are excluded and eat their feast with their own kindreds.

The eligible members of the family having assembled, the grandmother holds a pair of fowls, male and female, by their heads and says: "O Lord of the demons, we are offering to thee the flesh of fowls and pigs. Free us from all illness." After wringing the necks of the chickens, she orders their feathers to be burned off preparatory to cooking them with salt and chili only. Rice is also cooked. These viands are set out and the priestess eats a morsel, followed by her sons and each of the other relatives in the

[1] [For description of ceremony, see p. 248 ff. Cat. 116 - Analys

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736 boos. Quite satisfied with this demonstration of their magic
789 power, the grandmother allowed them to go on their mission. In
538 the battle that followed the seven orphans severally engaged the champions of the seven victorious villages and won back for the maiden's father the treasure that he had been forced to pay over in the previous raids. The oldest of the brothers then received the hand of the chief's daughter in marriage, having cleared himself of the curse that had rested upon him as an orphan.

Why such extraordinary powers have been attributed to the once despised orphan is not known. At first he was feared for the bad luck he might bring to the other inhabitants of the village, if allowed to remain within the stockade. That he did not perish as an outcast in the jungle must have been regarded as a sort of miracle by the village community, whose members had always lived and worked together in close interdependence. They must have looked upon him with awe and believed that he was protected by some powerful influence, not only from the evilly disposed "Bgha" but also from the dangers of the forest. It was, therefore, natural enough to regard him in course of time as a person who had "pgho." In these later days orphans appear to have been considered less extraordinary persons, as indicated by the following couplet:

[539] "In olden times the orphans had magic.
Orphans now must talk" [like other persons].

741 The "k' thi thra" or "medicine-teachers" constitute another
753 group that should be mentioned among magic-workers. It is true
757 that they possess a rude knowledge of the efficacy of roots and herbs, but they also sometimes dispense disgusting and filthy concoctions. The Karen, like other primitive peoples, regard sickness as due to some mysterious force or "mana" and believe that all medicine, even that prescribed by European physicians, operates to dispel or vanquish this force. They expect a dose to cure immediately and discredit a medicine that must be taken repeatedly. Hence, in general, they prefer their native "medicine-teacher" and his nostrums to the educated physician and his medicine, the therapeutic effects of which are beyond their understanding. Doubtless, some Karens do distinguish between the charm and the drug, but most of them seem to cling to the idea that the drug has more or less of the charm connected with it.

784 Magic among the Karen, as among other primitive races, is divisible into white and black magic. The former is the beneficent

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conditions being attributed to the presence of wind ("k'li"), fire ("me"), or water ("paw leh"). The elders assert that fifteen hundred cavities in the abdomen contain wind, twelve contain fire, and one contains water. The prevalence of wind over the other elements produces pride, ambition, avarice, evil desires, and hilarity. When fire is in the ascendancy, one is incited to envy, malice, hatred, and revenge. When water predominates, issuing from its single cavity, it disseminates peace, love, kindness, patience, quietness, and other allied virtues. The various qualities are intermingled in one's character in proportion to the mingling of the several elements.[9]

Many of the charms worn by both the Karen and the Burmese are intended to prevent wind from gaining the ascendency in the abdomen. Among such charms are strings of dried berries of certain plants, strings of coins that have been blown upon, and knotted cords that have been put on the wearer by elders or prophets.

Something remains to be said about the "k' thi thras" or "medicine-teachers," who compound drugs from various roots and herbs with which they practice a sort of medical lore, in addition to their occult rites. There is no doubt but that they understand the medicinal action of certain plants. They will often point out a particular tree with the remark that its leaves are good for fever or some other ailment. On my request for some prescriptions a Karen doctor gave me a hundred of them. Dr. Wade has collected over forty pages of medical formulae of various kinds, among them many of real value. Dr. Mason mentions the name of a small creeping plant *(Hydrocotyle asiatica)* which, if applied as a poultice in time, will arrest, if it does not cure, leprosy.[10] How many of these Karen prescriptions are of Burmese, Shan, or Talign origin I am unable to say. I have been told several times that the Karen who still remain in their primitive condition, depend wholly on magic and offerings to cure sickness. My observation leads me to believe that the use of medicine increases, as the people come more and more into contact with other races.

The Karen believe that smells have a marked effect on the body, both for good and for ill. There is hardly anything that a Karen or, indeed, a Burman fears so much as he does the smell of cooking fat ("ta neu xo"). They believe that the odor somehow enters the body, especially if there is an abrasion of the skin,

[9] *The Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, p. 500.
[10] Dr. F. Mason, *British Burma, Its People and Productions*, pp. 561, ff.

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and causes all kinds of trouble, even sudden death. To avoid coming in contact with this smell, they usually do any frying that may be necessary out-of-doors and hold their hands over their noses to keep off the dread danger. For curative purposes smelling-salts are popular among both Karens and Burmans, when they can be bought in bazaar. Many of the medicines contain asafoetida and other pungent-smelling ingredients, which are thought to have an immediate effect on the patient. Bitter and acrid-tasting drugs are also in great favor.

755 278

Apart from such remedies the Karen "medicine-teachers" resort to disgusting concoctions of the scrapings from the horns of the sambur, the hair and genitals of certain animals, tigers' and leopards' whiskers, certain parts of human corpses, the body hair of human beings, dung of all kinds, the scrapings from the charred ends of bamboos used in piercing corpses on the funeral pyre, etc. The urine of one sex is sometimes prescribed as a liniment for persons of the opposite sex. The following is a prescription taken from the *Karen Thesaurus*, where it is described as "a grand febrifuge": "Take the umbilical cord cut from a new-born child, the undigested kernels from the dung of a dog, white and red onions, ginger and black pepper in equal quantities; mix thoroughly and make into pills the size of the end of the little finger; dose, one at a time to be taken in hot water." [11]

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The formulae for other kinds of pills are even more disgusting than that just given. Draughts, lotions, liniments, smelling-compounds, liquids for bathing, hot and cold applications; herbs and other things to be hung over the patient, placed under his bed, or in an adjoining room, are among the strange mixtures that might be enumerated without interesting any but the curious.

[11] *The Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I. p. 641.

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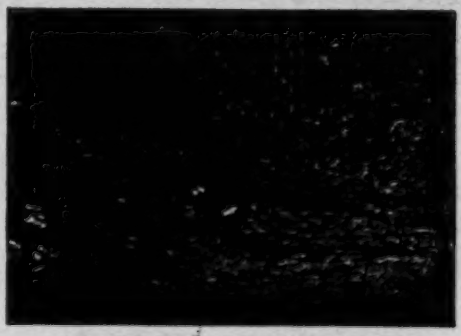
Men and Women

346. KAREN WITH DECOY-COCK.

labour out-of-doors till about sixty. The oldest women who can move make their daily journey for water, which is fetched and stored in joints of the giant bamboo. Old men occupy themselves with plaiting mats and baskets, and repairing gear. None are idle. The Karéns are acquainted with the medicinal virtues of many plants, such as bitter barks for ague. But all sickness and misfortunes are ascribed to the *nats*. Offerings and charms are relied on more than medicines. When a person dies, the body is treated with great respect, and every kind of offering is made to propitiate the spirit. The corpse is cremated, and the bones are buried at a place devoted to this use (*ayó-daung*), often at a distance, owing to the migrations of villages. Here a shrine is erected, consisting of a miniature hut, upon which a rude carving of a bird always figures. This symbolizes a mythical creature which conveys the spirit over rivers and chasms on its wanderings. For some time after a death, cotton threads are stretched beside the footbridges for the spirit to pass by on, without meeting the living. A shrine similar to that at the *ayódaung* is made at a place where two roads cross, and at each shrine the clothing of the deceased, and sometimes new clothing and utensils, are dedicated. It is at funerals that the dreary Karén music is chiefly heard. The tones are very widely contrasted. The dirge is accompanied by the notes of the *pátzi*, a great drum of bronze, cast in the Shan country, in a single piece, though the metal is only the eighth of an inch thick. The *pátzi* is struck on the end with a padded hammer for the deep fundamental tone, and flicked on the side with a stick to bring out harmonics an octave or two higher.



347. DECOY-COCK IN THE CIRCLE OF SNARES.

The *Karennî*, or "Red